



Brief Patristic Messages



“Pray Unceasingly”

“It is good for me to cleave unto God.”

(Psalm 62:28)

Part II

*† His Eminence, Metropolitan
Cyprian of Oropos and Fili*

THE USUAL convenient excuse made by the devout, when the brotherly exhortation to cultivate unceasing prayer is directed to them, is: “How is it possible to pray continuously in the midst of the world with all of its distraction?”

Is the commandment of the Holy Apostle Paul to “pray unceasingly” perhaps impracticable—a commandment which was certainly not addressed to monks and ascetics, but to newly-illuminated Christians who were living in idolatrous surroundings? Most assuredly not!

Let us, then, explore this vital question in greater depth.

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A basic misconception of believers in the matter of prayer is the notion that it is confined only to words; that is, to prayer with the lips.

Prayer, however, is first and foremost an expression of our spiritual willingness. It is a heartfelt yearning, which becomes all the more fervent when it is followed by good deeds.

The entire life of a regenerated Christian is a prayer in which the mind, heart, lips, and works take part.

The pious person's existence is Eucharistic and doxological; it is a sacrifice of gratitude and doxology to our Lord and God; and it is the fulfillment of another apostolic commandment: "Whether eating or drinking, or whatever you are doing, do all things to the glory of God."

It would be good to remember the relevant exhortations of St. Basil the Great:

"Pray while sitting at table. When eating bread, give thanks to Him Who has given it to you. When drinking wine, remember Him Who has given you this gift, which gladdens the heart. Has the need for food passed? Do not forget the Benefactor. While dressing, thank Him who has given you clothing, and may your love [thus] increase for God, Who grants you the necessary covering for both winter and summer. Has the day come to an end? Thank our Lord, Who has given us the sun in order for us to be able to do the work of the day and the light to serve the needs of the night. In the evening, again lift up your gaze and look at the sky and the beauty of the stars, and glorify the masterly Creator, Who in wisdom has made them all."

In this way, without our even realizing it, our heart is already in God: we live in an atmosphere of Grace and we breathe God and pray unceasingly, which is what we are seeking.

Hence, formal prayer is not required—that is, a purely formal and habitual repetition of fixed prayers at a set hour—, but a doxology, thanksgiving, confession, and petition everywhere and at all times—on the road, at work, in company, at home, and on trips.

This is no doubt difficult at first; but we have Divine and heavenly allies: the Holy Angels.

As the Holy Fathers tell us,

"The Holy Angels exhort us to prayer and are beside us, rejoicing and praying for us."

Let us not grow negligent, making excuses "with excuses in sins." Let us force ourselves, in order to become living Christians, people of prayer, God-bearing and Christ-bearing.

This unceasing, prayerful union with God will pave the way for the second, and profounder, stage of prayer; that is, the entrance of the mind into the heart and the dwelling in the heart of the Living Water—the Holy Spirit—, which becomes within us “*a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*”

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us and, through the intercessions of our Lady the *Theotokos* and by the power of the Precious Cross, grant us the thrice-blessed gift of unceasing prayer!

*† Sunday After the Exaltation of the
Precious Cross, 19 September/2 October 2005*

